

Castlemaine Naturalist

March 2007
Vol. 32.2 #341



Sanatorium Lake, Mt Macedon.

President's Report for 2006

Presented at the Annual General Meeting, 9th February 2007.

The year started with the now traditional Dawn Breakfast which was held at South German mine at Maldon in January.

In February we began our 30th Birthday Celebrations with an evening of nostalgia after the Annual General meeting. A revamp of the Club Emblem was also put forward and accepted that night. The Screen Saver, the result of much effort by Ern Perkins and several other members of the club as a special project for the Anniversary, was offered free to all members as they paid their annual subscription. They were also distributed to schools, the Library and the Tourist Information Centre.

General Meetings covered many subjects:

Phil Collier took us through a wonderful comparison of alpine areas and plants of Canada and Australia.

We went through new vegetation techniques with John Anthony, Environmental Officer with Mount Alexander Shire. Next day we enjoyed a field trip to the revegetation sites on Guildford plateau. The Project Manager, Maurie Dynon, one of the local farmers, showed us around after giving us a comprehensive talk on the work done.

Remember the talk by Julian Hollis on volcanoes? The next day he took us down to Trentham in the cold, showing us how he traced volcanoes, the source of minerals, by finding micro mineral deposits in streambeds. With red hands carefully washing out the mineral sands in a gold dish, he was able to show us the results with the aid of hand lenses. That was followed by a visit to the very low Upper Coliban reservoir where we lunched and visited two more different deposits - I think we all slept well that night. Julian was off to meet someone else to do another survey when he left us all in an exhausted state at the Reservoir.

Chris Morris took us to Antarctica via a slide show, but the next day the outing to Terrick Terrick had to be cancelled due to high winds.

A fascinating evening was had with Frances Cincotta on the identification of peas. The sheets she issued to use as a key are still in use - if we can find any pea flowers in bloom.

Phil Ingamells spoke to us on Canadian National Parks and global warming.

Ern Perkins talked on the wattles of the Box Ironbark country. For the outing that month we joined with the SEANA Campout at Maryborough for the day.

With the drought many of us have noted that many plants are dying or dead, and those that have flowered usually only have had a few small flowers on them. Yet during plant surveys of two of the small reserves around the district, and on the 5 Wednesday evening wildflower walks, we were surprised just how many plants were in flower.

We had a working bee in the botanical gardens in the butterfly area to plant 200 seedlings in August and there was a Broom Pull later that month. In October a number of us spent a couple of hours trying to find the Butterfly larvae with the aid of torches, but were unsuccessful. However we all went up to Kalimna afterwards to see exactly what they looked like as the colony in the Point area was known to be quite active. Why there were none at the Butterfly area of the gardens is a mystery still. We still do four or five roadside cleanups a year, picking up litter and taking out weeds such as gazenias or St John's wort as we go.

We were asked to help Mary Thompson with her After Anakie photographic exhibition, financially and helping to man the exhibition. The proceeds went to the local Fire Brigade. Later we had a field trip to the area to check out for ourselves the results of the fires.

The money earned from the Eureka Project, a series of surveys at the Eureka Village Walking Track over 2005 and 2006, meant we were able to buy a digital projector, laptop and screen for use by the club. Because of the nature of the projector only those with training in its use (not really very onerous we are told) will be allowed to use it. The replacement of the very delicate globe is extremely expensive.

A number of 30 x 30 metre quadrats have been set out in pairs through the bush to compare the effects of burning and "environmental thinning" on the ecology of the Box Ironbark forest, and these surveys are ongoing.

We've taken part in the twice-yearly Swift Parrot surveys, but the only sightings have been in and around the grounds of the Castlemaine Golf Club at Muckleford. We also took part in the BOCA bird challenge in December. It is not a good time of year for such things as people are so busy, but nevertheless several of us did go out looking but both numbers and species of birds were down on the last few years, probably due to drought conditions.

The Weed CD, "Is It a Native?", has sold out. It has been very successful, and Ern Perkins has taken on the job of updating it as a personal project, with the proceeds going to Conservation projects.

A very important part of the learning process of the club has been the observations of the club members, and an e-mail system has been set up to share sightings, thanks to Alison Rowe. The Castlemaine Naturalist carries many of these observations and is continuing to prove to be a very helpful newsletter, keeping the club informed of events, club meetings and outings, and supplying some very interesting articles. Again congratulations to the Editor, Geraldine Harris. Its a big job each month, always made easier by helpful members sending her articles, observations and newsy items to do with nature in all its forms.

It was decided that our Constitution needed to be looked into and updated, and it has proved to be a bigger job than at first anticipated. The sub-committee is still working on it and it is hoped that very soon the draft will be able to be presented to the club.

Early in the year, long time member, Enid Hall died. And in August we were saddened by the death of Kaye Turner, a very active member for many years, who allowed us to use her home for business meetings during that time, and Penny Garnet's husband, Tommy, who occasionally sent us observations via Penny.

The Club was also involved in environmental issues such as C24, and the Highway trees at Tunnel Hill, and we have seen a covenant put over the Swift Parrot area near the Golf Course.

The Club year has been a very active one. The 80 plus members have been given the opportunity to hear a good variety of speakers, and despite the drought, we have had a variety of interesting field trips. We have several ongoing projects: the Butterfly area in the gardens (counting butterflies, planting, and pulling weeds from the area), the Roadside cleanups, quadrats, bird surveys, and hopefully, a schools project to encourage an interest in the natural history of the district.

We also have a website and lots of pamphlets and booklets of a variety of natural history subjects, thanks largely to Ern Perkins

Finally, and most importantly, thank you to all the Committee, especially George Broadway as Secretary, Hans van Gemert who has completed another year as Treasurer, Ern Perkins who has continued as Webmaster (now Web Editor) along with numerous other tasks, Geraldine Harris continued to keep up the standard of the Castlemaine Naturalist, Richard Piesse took on the job of finding Field Trips, Athol Dorman kept track of Club equipment and Chris Morris continually kept an eye out for speakers. Noela Cain unfortunately couldn't attend many meetings but still contributed and Nigel Harland had to drop out early in the year. My thanks to you all. And I'm sure the thanks of all the members go to Helen Morris and her helpers for seeing the supper is ready and Maggie Oliver for taking charge of mailing the Castlemaine Naturalist. Thanks also go to Ern and Lesley Perkins for the use of their lounge for business and sub-committee meetings.

Rita Mills, Pres.



Julian Hollis panning for micro minerals.
Photos: Geraldine Harris



Afternoon tea at Day's Picnic Ground, Macedon.

Bird Bath List, Yapeen – Monday 5th February, Margaret Badminton

Honeyeaters (Brown-headed, Yellow-faced, White-plumed, New Holland (1), White-naped), Thornbills, (Brown, Yellow, Yellow-rumped, Striated), Crimson and Eastern Rosellas, White-winged Choughs (3 families at once!), Weebill, Grey Fantail, Blue Wrens, Silvereyes, Spotted and Striated Pardalote (18)

Other birds on the property this early morning Australian Magpie, Galah, Australian Raven, Long-billed Corella, Sulphur-crested Cockatoo, Straw-necked Ibis, Crested Pigeon, Common Bronzewing, Noisy Miner (only on perimeter, they usually stay in the neighbour's place!), Little Eagle, Little Pied Cormorant (flying over) and Kookaburra. Total 30.

A walk from Day's Picnic Ground to Sanatorium Lake, Mt Macedon, 10/2/07.

For the nineteen members who joined the walk to Sanatorium Lake on Macedon the shaded green bush was a real treat. It was so unlike our drought affected dry crunchy bush around Castlemaine but members from further south were quick to remind us that "it is all relative" and in fact their bush is the driest they have seen it for years.

Some of the plants we identified were:

Austral Bugle <i>Ajuga australis</i>	Manna Gum <i>Eucalyptus viminalis</i>
Austral Cranesbill <i>Geranium affinis solanderi</i>	Messmate <i>Eucalyptus obliqua</i>
Australian Clematis <i>Clematis aristata</i>	Mountain Pepper <i>Tasmania lanceolata</i>
Blanket-leaf <i>Bedfordia arborescens</i>	Musk Daisy-bush <i>Olearia argophylla</i>
Bottle-daisy <i>Lagenophora sp</i>	Prickly Currant-bush <i>Coprosma quadrifida</i>
Bootlace Bush <i>Pimelea axiflora</i>	Rough Coprosma <i>Coprosma hirtella</i>
Candlebark <i>Eucalyptus rubida</i>	<i>Senecio sp</i>
Christmas Bush <i>Prostanthera lasiantha</i>	Snowy Daisy-bush <i>Olearia lirata</i>
Common Cassinia <i>Cassinia aculeata</i>	Tasman Flax-lily <i>Dianella tasmanica</i>
Elderberry <i>Panax Polyscias sambucifolia</i>	White Elderberry <i>Sambucus</i>
Hazel Pomaderris <i>Pomaderris aspera</i>	<i>gaudichaudiana</i>

Although we did not see any on our walk, Snow Gums *Eucalyptus pauciflora* are present on the Camels Hump and near Memorial Cross. But they will have to wait for another visit.

Geraldine Harris and Richard Piesse

“Duinitezy” Travel Update – Ken and Maureen Dredge

It is with regret that Maureen and I will not be renewing our membership this year. Due to our ongoing travels we will be unable to attend any meetings or field outings in the foreseeable future.

We would like to thank all the members for their support and encouragement to us over many years of our learning (Now Lesley, are these Pink Fingers or Caladenia?). We have nothing but great memories of our times and outings with the Field Nats. Keep up the good work.

PS. We made it home from the “Duinitezy Trip” to the centre and west, in time for Christmas. Ten and half months on the road, 28,000km, 420 species of birds and a wonderful insight into the vast expanses and isolation of these parts of our great continent.

However, now in mid February it is far too hot to be “Duinitezy” in Barham, so we are heading off down to the Otway Forest region for a couple of weeks.

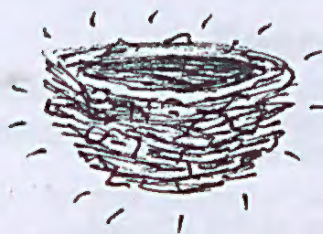
We hope to start our next big trip at Easter. Commencing with a week or two at Phillip Island with family, we will head up the east coast slowly. We are really looking forward to birding in the north of Queensland. That’s where our next batch of new birds will hopefully come from.

We hope to be back by Christmas!!!

We will try to send you a birding update later in the year.

Ken and Maureen.

Editor’s Note: It is always sad to lose generous and enthusiastic members such as Maureen and Ken but so good to here that they are enjoying their nomadic life and planning more birding trips. Thank you Maureen and Ken for keeping us up to date and we look forward to whatever newsy updates you can manage when you have a spare moment.



A very special nest!

At the February Committee meeting George Broadway produced a very beautiful little nest with gold thread meticulously woven through it. It was found by local textiles artist Alice Clague in her garden. How appropriate – two artists influencing each other!

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the club.

February Observations

- Bruce Donaldson played a mystery birdcall to members at the AGM and asked for suggestions – no one was able to correctly identify the calls made by two baby Boobook owls calling in the late afternoon for their dinner - on the second night there were four babies calling!
- Howard Tozer also sent a query to members as to what would be responsible for a large hole (big enough for him to crawl into) tunnelled under one of his shrubs. The culprit - a Black Wallaby .
- Bruce Donaldson has noted Stringybark and Messmates heavy in blossom the Macedon area – caps from blossoms like snowflakes under the trees.
- Robyn van Smeerdijk had a Golden Whistler flying under her verandah and six honeyeaters in a bowl of water including a Yellow-tufted Honeyeater which is a new bird for Robyn's home list.
- Bruce Donaldson has noticed lots of juvenile honeyeaters - Yellow-faced, White-naped and Eastern Spinebills.
- 5/2 Further confirmation of the early appearance of red robins this year (see report in January edition) – first pair of Scarlet Robins for the season at the birdbath - usually they don't appear before April. Alison Rowe
- 14/2 Muriel Sovar sighted two Scarlet Robins at Campbells Creek - wondered if high country fires drove them south early.
- 15/2 Frog spawn on bush dam that filled after downpour six days ago. Geraldine Harris
- 18/2 A single Tawny-crowned Honeyeater in the garden. I had never seen one before. Also of interest recently, though we've occasionally had them here before, 3 Rainbow Bee-eaters on both Thursday and Friday. Alison Rowe
- 19/2 On my walk with the Walkers Lane gals this morn we saw a Yellow-footed Antechinus hopping about amongst dead trees and branches at the base of a Box tree in Providence Gully Road, Sandon around 8am: JOY! Frances Cincotta
- 22/2 Spreading Wattle in flower at top of Wheeler St. Rita Mills
- Ants of all shapes and sizes appearing locally and also European Wasps.
- And a query Swift Parrot sighting from Julie and Rex Odgers – has anyone else seen them about? The earliest sighting in 2006 was on February 1!
- 25/2 Margaret Willis and her niece heard an unfamiliar ring at the start of their walk along the Elphinstone/Taradale water race and on their return they had a good view of the culprits in the trees in Wright St - a dozen or so Bell Miners!

How to identify yellow daisies?

I recently found three yellow daisy flowers in the paddock and I decided it was time I knew how to identify them. First I needed to know what to look for. Using my trusty "Is it a native" CD I made this list:

Yam Daisies (Murrong) *Microseris* sp (native)

- leaves are confined to a basal rosette , there are no stem leaves
- the leaves are narrow and may have a few narrow lobes
- there is only a single flower
- the stem holding the bud curves causing the bud to nod over and it only straightens as the flower opens, this is a distinctive feature of the Yam Daisy
- the flower has relatively few petals – less than 20 , often about 12.

Cat's Ear *Hypochoeris radicata* (weed)

- the hollow stem is often branched
- stem thickens just below the flower
- the leaves are in basal rosettes, over 5cm long and are hairy
- the green leaf-like bracts behind the flowers are erect and not curled back

Dandelion *Taraxicum officinale* sp agg (weed)

- leafless hollow stalks
- rosette of irregularly lobed leaves and the lobes curl back towards the leaf base
- the green leaf like bracts behind the flower point downwards away from the flower

Now all I need is lots of practice.

Geraldine Harris

Night Parrot found - Birds Australia 19 February 2007

As reported in last Friday's Australian newspaper, Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service Rangers found a dead Night Parrot at Diamantina National Park in November 2006. The specimen was positively identified by Queensland Museum. This is the first confirmed sighting since the Boulia specimen in 1990 although several unconfirmed but credible sightings have been made since, most recently in the Pilbara WA. The bird appears to have died after colliding with a fence some weeks before.

Recent flood rains in the Channel Country has made access for follow-up surveys difficult and it is probable that any surviving Night Parrots in the area will have redistributed in the months since this bird died.

Further information: Graeme Hamilton, (03) 9882 2622,

ceo@birdsaustralia.com.au.

From the Business Meeting 22/2/07

Welcome to new members: Lawrence Fields and family, Natasha Harris and Edward Oram, Anne and Oliver Halliwell.

- An expression of appreciation was voiced for the work done by those committee members standing down from service and new members were welcomed onto the committee. A President and Vice President still need to be appointed. Reminder: All members are invited to attend committee meetings.

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Programme

March 2007

General meetings - (second Friday of each month, except January) are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) Hall (enter from Lyttleton St.) at 8.00 pm.

Field Trips - (Saturday following the general meeting) leave from the carpark opposite Castle Motel, Duke Street at 1.30pm sharp unless stated otherwise. BYO morning and/or afternoon tea. Outdoor excursions are likely to be cancelled in extreme weather conditions. There are NO excursions on total fire ban days.

Business meetings - fourth Thursday of each month, except December, at 7 Wheeler Street, at 7.30 pm. All members are invited to attend.

VISITORS ARE WELCOME.

Mar 7-13. SEANA Campout in the Otways. Host: Geelong Field Naturalists Club.

Fri Mar 9. Meeting: The Mount Alexander Sustainability Group. Dean Bridgfoot.

Sat Mar 10. Field Trip: North Harcourt Reservoir. BYO afternoon tea, chairs and binoculars. Leader: Rita Mills. Ph 5472 4553.

Tue Apr 3. Castlemaine State Festival / CFNC Walk -

Habitat of the Box Ironbark Forest - West Botanic Gardens. Eltham Copper Butterfly habitat. Depart 4pm from Botanical Gardens Rose Garden Carpark. Return 5.30pm. Leader: Richard Piesse, Ph 0407 087 319.

Fri Apr 13. Meeting: An Evening with David Hollands and Birds. (Author of "Owls: journeys around the world" and Birds of the Night).

Sat Apr 14. Field Trip: Tipperary Walk. Leader: Chris Morris, Ph 0418 996 289.

2007 Committee

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Subscriptions for 2007

Ordinary membership: Single \$22, Family \$30

Pensioner or student: Single \$19, Family \$24

The subscription includes postage of the monthly newsletter, *Castlemaine Naturalist*.

Website: <http://home.vicnet.net.au/~cfnc>

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